

RECEIVED
CHARLOTTE, NC

AUG 22 2019

Clerk, US District Court
Western District of NC

July 1, 2019

To the Honorable Judge Robert J. Conrad,
United States District Judge
235 Charles R. Jonas Federal Building
401 West Trade Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Please take this letter into consideration when sentencing Ms. Amanda M. Stone. I have worked with hundreds of families and thousands of individuals in the Asheville Buncombe Community in the field of Social Services, Mental Health and Addictions for the past 25 years.

On numerous occasions I, and others, informed Ms. Stone that cases were being mishandled, children were being put at risk, and as a result, families were experiencing extreme negative factors. I see children today as patients, that I worked with over 10 years ago, who were put in those high-risk environments despite the pleading of the family and professional warnings.

I, and others, urged Ms. Stone to monitor workers more closely and provide accountability as well as support on the mandate of conducting collateral interviews during the investigative process. Collaterals are individuals in the family and community that have close personal or working relationships with the individuals in question. Information and input from extended family, friends and community members is critical in making case accurate decisions and formulating case plans including referrals to appropriate services and supports. No accountability was provided. No changes were made. As a result, a majority of children were either left in high risk environments or placed in high risk environments. The insult is that those poor decisions were made despite the objections of good people.

The children paid a great price. Some lost their lives. Others struggle to cope with the injuries and scars sustained as a result of the decisions made by the department of health and human services. Family members have suffered too. They are vicarious victims being unheard and feeling helpless to do anything about what was happening with these children. In the past three years two children under the age of six have died horrific deaths. These deaths were completely preventable.

In 2017 three-month-old Elizabeth Eccleston was murdered by her juvenile parents. In 2016 a report was made, and concerns were raised about the child being born to parents who were still dependent themselves. A safety assessment was done deeming the child conditionally safe. Another report was made and during the second investigation the child died of head trauma and then both juvenile parents were charged with her murder. The mother's social media was full of murderous, dark and sadistic material. This was either ignored or completely overlooked. The warning signs were there. I don't know what kind of collateral interviewing was done if any during the investigation process.

You may be aware of the Lila Marie Pickering murder case. This child was violently murdered by her father on the parkway in front of two US Park Rangers. This occurred on federal land and was tried in federal court. Mr. Pickering was sentenced two years ago.

In this case, the decision somehow was made to leave the child with the father. The mother had fled the domestic violence and was fighting to have her child returned to her. There were numerous other family members willing to take Lila until the case could be settled.

Multiple high-risk factors were evident in this case without collateral interviews. There were three reports of domestic violence within the first thirty days of the case. There was a 911 recording where Lila can be heard saying, "don't hurt my mama." Mr. Pickering's serious mental health issues including suicidal ideation and alcohol and drug use were extensively documented by the Veterans Administration. There was multiple visits to the ER by Mrs. Pickering for torn rotator cuff and suspicious bruising. Mr. Pickering's father expressed concerns about his son's ability to care for Lila. Lila remained in his care until just before the murder. The child's body was returned to the mother. This is the most grotesquely handled case I have ever witnessed.

I met with a young lady yesterday who will be 21 in September. I began working with her family when she was nine years old. The department placed this child with a Type A alcoholic step-grandfather who said in a team meeting at the department that he did not intend to quit drinking. Once again, this case was brought to the attention of Ms. Stone who was unresponsive to the situation herself or willing check collateral contacts in the case. The child was traumatized by a system that made uninformed decisions and a director who was not available to personally hear the pleas of this family. This young lady now lives with the physical and psychological scars of being placed with him. There are *many* other children and families affected in similar ways. But for times sake I will leave it at that and upon your request for additional information.

The reason I am writing is not only because of Ms. Stone's lack of regard for input from family members, friends and community members but also because of her choice of activities during the time these families were pleading with her and her administration.

During the time that Lila's case was being mishandled, Ms. Stone had gotten approval for a 50-million-dollar office complex that was in the construction phase. The concern was office space and parking: Office space and parking? 50 million dollars would have gone a long way in training, hiring and improving outcomes at the department of human services.

Greed played a role in their suffering. These children and their families continue to pay the price for the role she ignored and the duties she neglected to carry out. They are the ones that carry the scars for her lack of leadership and diligence. I suppose she had other more important things to do.

With Regards,


Kristie Sluder BSW MSW LCSW LCAS

60 BlackBerry Inn Rd

Weaverville NC 28787

828.333.3609

2019-08-22 10:00 AM
2019-08-22 10:00 AM